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## Emerging Interest Groups in Romania

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### Democracy and Organized Interests

A part of civil society, interest groups are "organizations which have some autonomy from government or political parties and...try to influence public policy"<sup>1</sup>. In relation to modern democracy, one can start with James Madison, a "Founding Father" and also President of the United States. He very logically explains in "Federalist 10" that democracies are, due to human nature, representations of interests and interest groups<sup>2</sup>. Stating that interest groups can exist, and even that they naturally find a place in a democratic political system, does not, however, imply that they will organize spontaneously or quickly.

By conducting studies of the formation and formal organization of interest groups in the United States, David Truman suggests that group formation takes place only when an interest common to the group is disturbed by economic, social, political or technological change<sup>3</sup>. A classic example is of organized labor unions. Industrialization disturbed lives of the working class; and in time the workers organized in an attempt to improve their conditions. By uniting, the workers expected to become a strong block, capable of dealing with management. Eventually unions proved to be influential politically as the idea spread to all kinds of workers – agricultural, semi-professional, etc. Unions became commonplace and powerful in many of the world's democracies, due to their ability to mobilize a large constituency of voters that in a united form could have a strong political influence. A group of people perceived a threat, and in reaction to that threat they organized an interest group: the labor union.

This organization pattern becomes wavelike as one organization becomes a catalyst for the formation of yet another. For example, when workers in the steel industry form a union, the companies they work for feel threatened by the agenda of the union. Higher wages, fewer working hours, and benefits all cost money, and so the businessmen move to protect their bottom line: they form a steel manufacturers' association to represent their agenda to law and policy makers<sup>4</sup>. Of course, as more groups form, the more other unorganized interest groups feel that they must also organize to protect themselves, and the waves continue, like ripples in a pond.

Most scholars use a common method of classifying interest groups known as the Communal-Associational model<sup>5</sup>. The model categorizes groups based on the common interest that binds the group together. Communal ties are those acquired by birth, such as family, ethnic, or linguistic relationships. On the other end of the spectrum are Associational ties – voluntary relationships that are linked by single purposes, such as saving whales or promoting gun control. The four categories, along with Romanian examples, are presented in Figure 1.

<sup>1</sup> G. WILSON, *Interest Groups*, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1990.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading on interest groups as a part of democracy and also federalism, Federalist 10 can be read on the Internet at <http://www.law.emory.edu/FEDERAL/federalist/feder10.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Truman referred to this as "Disturbance Theory", and it is the basic theory for interest group organization, although it now has many names.

<sup>4</sup> Assuming that simply firing all the workers and hiring new ones would be illegal.

<sup>5</sup> A good discussion on the Communal-Associational model is available in J. BLONDEL, *Comparative Government: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, Mass., 1995.

Rod Hague argues that Communal ties are more important in less economically developed countries, and that as a country becomes more economically developed, Associational relationships are more important, and that this is then reflected in the political importance given to the groups<sup>6</sup>. All governments deal with interest groups when this definition is used, because even different ministries can be viewed as interest groups when it comes to budget discussions. And it should be noted that customary groups are only rarely

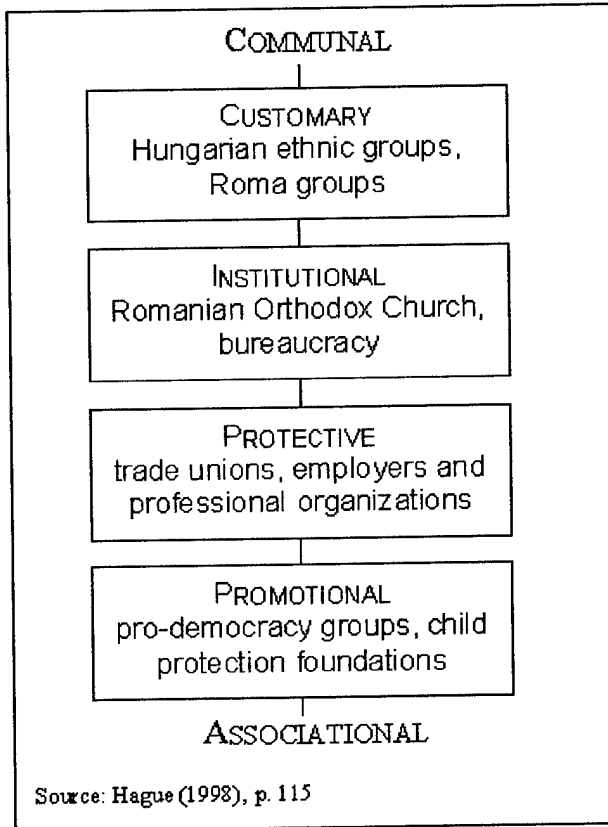


Figure 1 Classifying interest groups using the Communal-Associational model

organized as an "interest group" per se, but unite only when disturbed, and even then sometimes without formal leadership. Even in a totalitarian dictatorship, friends and advisors seek to influence policy making for their own gain. In a consolidated democracy, however, we expect to see not just one or two categories, but all of these kinds of interest groups as they pursue their goals. Concerning governments that are transitioning to democracy, the development of protective and promotional groups is key.

#### Political Action

The other broad field of interest group study is their methods of political action. This differs greatly from country to country, as methods that groups may use are influenced not just by form of government, but also by culture. Two theoretical models that show how interest groups can attain their goals are policy communities and issue networks.

In the case of less transparent governments, civil servants and interest groups can, and often do, have private meetings. Policy communities are these close-knit groups that meet, usually in private so as to avoid politicizing, to discuss the issues relative to their interest. The main actors are fairly constant, for even though parties change with elections, civil servants usually do not. This results in a greater degree of trust between the actors and allows them to work together in a non-confrontational manner. This is a managed system in which public demonstrations are viewed as bad publicity by all concerned and the actors feel that they are working for a common good. The public usually does not know what is going on and taxpayers are the only victims of their policies. The interest groups invited to the table are usually those with the greatest breadth and depth of membership, i.e., those that cover the greatest area and have the most penetrating membership. An example would be representatives of a national farmers association, which represented 75% of the country's farmers, meeting with representatives of

<sup>6</sup> Rod HAGUE, Martin HARROP, Shaun BRESLIN, *Political Science: A Comparative Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Worth Publishers, New York, 1998, p. 115.

the agriculture ministry to discuss subsidies. The farmers don't strike, the government meets them halfway, and the taxpayer foots the bill.

Although policy communities have been the norm for interest group activity, the increasing desire by taxpayers for transparency has changed the policy community system in many countries into a looser relationship called an issue network. If a policy community can be called a village, an issue network is like a town or small city. Many more players get involved in decision making, seeking to achieve their goals. To continue the farmers' association example, others interested in the subsidy issue would include groups dealing with the food industry - processing, retail, and exporting - who would all want to see their business protected, civic groups from rural areas interested in supporting the farmers against the businessmen, consumer protection groups seeking to keep food prices low for consumers, and the list could continue.

Within the environment of an issue network, authority doesn't depend just on depth of membership but also on expertise. A large consumer protection group would not, perhaps, have as much weight in a committee meeting as a group of intellectuals who could present a study outlining the negative impact of a large subsidy on the national economy. By the same logic, comments made by one large company, an important source of tax revenue, can carry more weight than millions of farmers' votes.

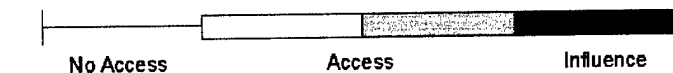
Just how "democratic" interest group action is depends on the political environment, political structure, and culture of a state. Policy communities, known as "iron triangles" in America, are seen as corruption by many, while issue networks involve more players but still limit those who can try to influence decision making to a small representation of society, rather than a simple "majority rules" system.

## Access and Influence

The idea of a policy network assumes that an interest group has a say in policy, while an issue network places more emphasis on legislatures and politicians to actually make policy, once they have been given information. The ability of any particular interest group to

affect policy can be measured on a scale of access to influence. Figure 2 is an Access—Influence Continuum that presents a framework for discussing how much a particular group may influence policy makers. The idea of "access," as shown in the figure, is one of putting forth the question "will policy makers make time to listen to this particular group?"

Some groups, particularly those high-density membership groups representing large constituencies,



### Key:

- Positioning—lobbying to establish contacts and to maintain cordial relations or to seek information; no messages or requests about specific legislative issues or policies.
- Message—lobbyist conveys relevant information and arguments regarding specific legislative issues or policies
- Party or legislator adjusts their belief on the basis of the group's lobbying message.

Source: Adapted from Wright (1996), p. 78.

**Figure 2 Categorizing the Amount of Influence an Interest Group has on Policy-Making**

will always have access. The term "influence" is used to state the ability of a group to change the opinion of a party or legislator, and influence is what all groups strive for. Groups move along this scale by lobbying, which is broken down into three stages which are always active, meaning that a lobbyist cannot expect to move to stage 2 and stay there if he forgets about

stage 1. The first stage of the lobby is to position your group with those you are targeting. This can be done by campaign contributions, favors, or simply meeting the right person at a social event. The second stage involves asking for what you want, selling your point of view with as much persuasiveness as possible. The third stage is the reaction of the party or legislator lobbied – do they change their opinion?

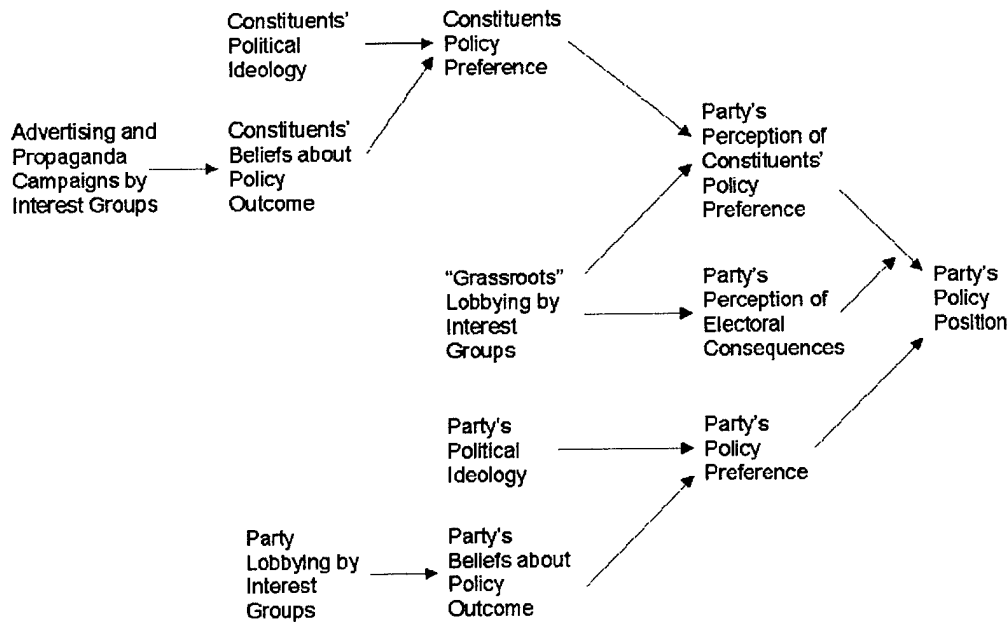
The first stage of the lobbying process is the most visual and the most varied. Groups have many methods of gaining policy-makers' attention, which can be called methods of political action. The perception that most lobbying takes place behind closed doors reflects a narrow view of the political process. If lobbying is defined as the methods by which a group or individual gains access and influence among policy makers, then the number of methods of political action increases considerably. The classical "behind closed doors" view of lobbying that was characteristic of policy networks did not consider the role interest groups play in so-called "grass roots" lobbying. Legislators are influenced by a number of factors, and interest groups will seek to apply pressure at those points where the legislator may be influenced.

Two important points for gaining access are depth and breadth of membership. Depending on the political system, these two factors vary in importance. Depth of membership is the percentage of possible members that an organization represents. It is easy, for example, to understand why the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) with its 28 million members – all registered voters – is a powerful voice in Washington decision-making. But intuition tells us that the AARP is not powerful simply because it has 28 million members, but rather because it represents almost all the retired persons in the United States – it has depth of membership. Were there to be another 50 million retired persons in the US, this group would lose access because it would not longer represent all of the retired persons.

Breadth of membership, the geographical coverage of a group, can be important based on voting systems and the level of government (national v. city). In the United States, where single member districts are the rule, a group may be able to represent all of the miners in a certain state, so that groups should have access in that state government, as well as in the national legislature via the state's senators and congressmen. Or we can consider a union that represents most of the taxi drivers in New York City; it should have access to the mayor's office, but would not have as much access in the state legislature unless it also represented taxi drivers in other cities. While having a breadth of membership is not important in all cases, having a depth of membership is important in almost every case.

The major exception would be those groups that achieve what can be called "expert" status. Policy-makers consult with these groups as they would with ministers and other government organizations. These groups are respected because their opinions are usually right. More often than not these groups are promotional; being very specific in their expertise. When an interest group's record and stature accord it an "expert" status, it obtains access because politicians care to know their opinion.

Influence follows access, but is not necessarily its byproduct. Many groups may have access, but as their agendas usually differ, certainly not every group can have access. Also, it would not be correct to assume that democracy is a direct representation of organized interests as many factors influence lawmakers. Figure 3 represents some of the channels of access and influence that interest groups and voters at large have.



Source: Adapted from Wright (1996), p. 68

**Figure 3 Interest Group Activities and the Determinations of Party Policy Positions**

Interest groups compete with each other, as well as with the voters' and parties' ideologies. Influence – the ability to change a policy-maker's position on an issue – is not easily won. In a system like the one represented in figure 3, where parties are the key players, interest groups have three main channels – advertising so as to influence the voters, organizing “grassroots” lobbying by large numbers of voters, and the direct, traditional, lobbying of party leaders. While depth and breadth of membership can affect all three, expertise is chiefly valuable to advertising and direct lobbying.

There are, of course, many concerns about the role of interest groups in policy making. Within the lobbying process, many citizens worry about the ability of an expert, academic or elite group to misrepresent information in its favor. Certainly the possibility exists, but interest groups are mostly self-regulating in this respect. Parties and legislators usually have many sources they can turn to for additional information, which creates competition among the different groups for who can be the best advisor on policy. In order to achieve access and influence, groups can scarcely afford misleading legislators regarding policy. This does not mean that all groups always tell the truth, but they are strongly influenced to be honest and accurate if they want to be long-term players.

For a large group to use its popularity is also a double-edged sword in the same sense. While a group may be popular, if it becomes too involved in too many issues often it will find itself in decline. Most groups that become highly politicized find that they quickly lose access to policy makers on the other side of the issue. Sometimes this is almost unavoidable, such as for a promotional group with a single issue that only one party is willing to champion. But for a group that seeks a broad membership, tackling too many issues can burn bridges. Interest groups that demand too much too often discover that they lose influence with parties who feel they can no longer count on steady support. A group can overcome these difficulties if it stays loyal to its membership – its powerbase – in which case it may become very strong indeed. Another danger to the ability of an interest group to be influential is lack of transparency, which can lead to a reputation for being corrupt.

Having laid the framework for understanding of interest groups, let us now examine the Romanian Case.

## Protective Groups

As Romania works through a transition period towards EU membership, reforms have resulted in a lower standard of living for most Romanians. Economic hardship is a chief catalyst for the formation of protective interest groups, on both the left and the right of political ideology, and based on disturbance theory they should organize and seek to be influential in Romanian politics.

### Labor Unions

Under Communism, unions existed, but were more organs of the party apparatus than interest groups. Union leaders were appointed through party channels, unions did not have the right to protest, and chiefly they served as a method of controlling workers rather than as a way for workers to voice their opinions. But for all of the issues regarding their nature, unions did exist during communism, and they served as a framework of communication and group activity. The advent of the revolution was heralded in a degree by unions; in Braşov on 15 November 1987, workers at the Roman truck factory protested in the streets in an attempt to influence the Central Committee to take action to reverse their decreasing living conditions. Unions also left their legacy on the revolution, as unions served as the main forum for the first revolutionary organizations in Timișoara<sup>7</sup>. Their impact continued in the form of the miners' unions marching on Bucharest in 1990 and again in 1991. Labor unions have been active, publicly visible, and influential in Romania.

The structure of labor unions in Romania follows their civil law tradition, and is codified. Romania's new Constitution, adopted in 1991, assigns unions the role of defending the rights of workers, within the limits of laws that government passes<sup>8</sup>. Their role is further entrenched by the Law of Unions (Legea Sindcatelor 54/1994) which accords state money for union activities and accords them detailed rights and procedures for redress of grievances.

Their breadth and depth of membership vary largely by industry. Virtually all unions represent workers belonging to the 70% of Romania's economy that is still state owned. Most official private enterprises are small and/or much better paying than state industry, and in these conditions workers have not organized. This means that workers in a state owned sector of the economy, like education and health care, are very organized, as are workers that belong to privatized industries, such as steel production. On the other hand, employees at banks and stores, the majority of which developed after the revolution, have not organized. Regarding the black market economy, which the National Institute for Statistics has estimated to be around 30% of the GDP, unions do not exist because it is inherently difficult for workers to organize and seek legal redress under black market conditions<sup>9</sup>. Thus, most labor union activity in Romania is limited to those industries and companies that are or were under state ownership, which is still a majority of the economy in terms of GDP.

These unions have formed five large umbrella organizations that conduct high-level talks with political parties<sup>10</sup>. These confederations formed shortly after the revolution, within a period of about two years. Unions join those confederations that they feel are best able to lobby and lead on their behalf, and may change their affiliation. The confederations are, in

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Ioan Bene OPREA, President of Asociația "Victoria" Timișoara, 6 March 2001.

<sup>8</sup> See Art. 9 of the Romanian Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> M.P., "The Underground Economy is now a Third of the GDP", *România Liberă*, 7 Sep 2001, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> These are: C.N.S.L.R. – Fratia, C.N. S. Cartel Alfa, Blocul Național Sindcal, Confederația Națională a Sindcatelor Democratice din România, and C.S.D.

turn, linked to European and other international labor union organizations, from which they receive legitimacy and training<sup>11</sup>.

Labor unions have influenced the politics of post 1989 Romania, chiefly by causing social chaos through mass demonstrations. Upon gaining the right to demonstrate, Romanian unions have not shown a disinclination to do so. In fact, if we consider the example of the miners in 1991, they were very willing to not just demonstrate, but also to be violent and threatening until their demands were met. Amidst these conditions, unions have, perhaps, been the most potent force countering the reforms enacted time and again by parties attempting to push Romania into the EU, NATO, and greater prosperity. Reforms necessitate, theoretically, economic difficulty, while in the long run promise a higher standard of living. As communist companies were not driven by the bottom line in a market that competed at world standards, to most Romanian companies privatization means salary cuts and layoffs. Those who were initially privatized suffered restructuring, and labor unions at other companies quickly opposed privatization, as vocally as they could.

The effects of labor unions on the early transition period are well noted by historian Stephen Roper: "The fundamental problem of the 1995 Vicariou government was that no one was willing to consistently apply economic reform policies. Measures were implemented and as soon as an important political constituency complained, for example miners or steel workers, the measures were lifted"<sup>12</sup>. Considering that the party that ruled the early transition period, PDSR, had campaigned on the idea of a painless transition to a free market economy, they could not afford to give offense to their chief constituency: labor union members. Again quoting from Roper: "Because the PDSR's political strength came from state workers, it failed to provide the political leadership necessary for economic reforms"<sup>13</sup>. This assessment clearly points out the power wielded by unions in defense of their jobs, but at the expense of Romania's transition to a free market economy and membership in Western institutions.

To consider labor unions on the Access-Influence scale, we need to understand that they are often able to change policy in their favor. They have *influence* in the government. How was this influence achieved? By the simple democratic mechanism of voting – Romanian labor unions are organizations of breadth and depth, easily representing over half of the work force, and in some cases management as well.<sup>14</sup> Here it should be noted that while Romanian labor unions cannot be considered well developed and mature by Western standards of experience and expertise, their relative level of development compared to the political system is what really matters<sup>15</sup>. Western unions often use sophisticated lobby techniques and have the financial and human resources that politicians and parties find very useful for campaigning. Romanian unions have succeeded in achieving influence due to the simple power of the vote. When labor unions representing a majority of the voters speak out, politicians listen.

Not to be overlooked is the effect of the classic tool of labor unions, the strike. Using the organization inherited from the days of Communism, unions that had once been used for top-to-bottom control were able to unite in nationwide strikes, which not only put pressure on

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<sup>11</sup> For a self-description of these labor union confederations, one may go to the Internet sites <http://www.bns.ro/home.html>; <http://www.cnslr-fratia.ro/>; and <http://www.cartel-alfa.ro/>.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen D. ROPER, *Romania: The Unfinished Revolution*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 2000, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Sorin IONIȚA, "Trend: Social Protest and Trade Unions' Motivations", *Early Warning Report-Romania 7/2001*, Romanian Academic Society, Bucharest, 2001, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Ionița points out in his article that Romanian labor unions are not well developed; in many cases their leadership is ineffective at negotiating with government.



politicians but also attracted the public's attention. This tool of political action is amplified by the high degree of centralization in Romania's political system. In the steel industry, for example, when steel workers at one plant go on strike, it is usually to protest not local but national policies, and that will encourage the other steel workers across the country, united by umbrella organizations, to join the strike. This effect is lessened by decentralization, but virtually every decision that influences state owned companies is made at the national level. Thus the same behavior can be seen in other economic sectors: education, manufacturing, public works, etc.

Of course, labor unions do not always have influence with political parties; this depends largely on the party and the political mood of the general population. Considering Figure 3, the flow chart of how parties may be influenced, we see that those parties whose politics do not favor unions, but rather favor the employers, would not be as likely to yield to union demands as would a more left oriented party. This would lead us to believe that unions would not have had as much influence with the CDR governments of 1996-2000, although certainly many labor union members even voted for the CDR in 1996. During those four years unions continued their same tactics and methods, but did not achieve the same level of influence, because those lawmakers most agreeable to be influenced by them no longer held a majority in the parliament. The situation reached a higher degree of tension in 1999, when miners again attempted to march on Bucharest. Of course, the final result was voiced at the ballot box in 2000.

Analysis of the influence level of unions from the last five years shows a general decline punctuated by periods of increased influence. This will continue as long as Romania transitions to EU membership, because the demands placed by the EU are the controlling factor in labor union influence. Among all of the countries hoping for EU membership, Romanian citizens are the most enthusiastic, with 81% of the population supporting the move<sup>16</sup>. With this kind of support, politicians walk a fine line if they make decisions that delay or dampen Romania's hopes for the European Union. Since 1997 Romanian governments have generally tried to steer the country towards the EU, and this will continue until membership is achieved barring some strange external or internal occurrences.

The EU admission process therefore drives the trend of declining labor union influence because the required privatization fragments the unions and the political system matures faster than the labor unions' organization<sup>17</sup>. Privatization divides union power because, instead of an exploitable relationship with the state, where the state is both the employer and mediator of negotiations, a new tri-party system of negotiation emerges between the new owner, the union, and the state as a mediator. Romanian unions prefer their companies to be public; sometimes strikes even have, as a goal, the cancellation of privatization contracts<sup>18</sup>. In other words, the state can more evenly balance the interests of the company, a taxpayer and driven by the bottom line, with the interests of the workers, whose current asset is their vote.

The maturing political system weakens union influence because, compared to the trend of party consolidation taking place in the political sphere, the unions are being fragmented by privatization. Certain political parties are gaining faith with the electorate and are solidifying their position as players in the political system. In the face of this

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<sup>16</sup> A Survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Opinion and Market, *România Liberă*, 8 Nov 2001, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> For a good account of how the Romanian politics is maturing, see Filon MORAR, "The Way out and the Way in: Post-Communism and Democracy in Romania", *Romanian Political Science Review*, Vol. II. No. 1, The Institute of Political Research, Bucharest, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, "Employees of Somvetra Gherla Expect the Nationalization of the Company", *Bursa Financial Newspaper*, 21 January 2002, in which the union hopes for the government to cancel a five-year-old privatization contract.

solidification, the unions' ability to successfully petition for government intervention is lessened by the parties' decreased dependence on the union vote.

This decrease in labor union influence is readily observed in the changed relations they have with PSD (formerly PDSR). The five large confederations are losing some of their ability to get what they want from the PSD – consider the Social Accord signed by union leaders and the government for 2001, which all sides recognized as impossible to implement, but signed anyway<sup>19</sup>. Union leadership went along with it because it was also “a PR campaign for the Unions” – in other words, they needed to be able to take something back to the union members to keep a level of legitimacy<sup>20</sup>. PSD is getting the political willpower (i.e. the popular support) to reform in spite of striking workers. This is further evidenced by the Minister of Labor's announced desire to rework the 1994 union law, for the vague purpose of restructuring<sup>21</sup>. Even the Prime Minister got into the act; when the PSD announced a curbing of the workers' comp benefits in the defense industry, PM Nastase also suggested that workers “not organize strikes in protest”<sup>22</sup>.

This decrease in labor union influence has had its reaction in several news conferences, in which the unions have tried to make their case as public as possible. The union confederations already receive, courtesy of the 1994 law, five minutes a month on national radio<sup>23</sup>. In order to increase their ability to reach the masses, they have asked for television time as well<sup>24</sup>. These attempts to better publicize their message may be expected to fall on unyielding, even if sympathetic, ears. The labor unions are not going to win in a fight with the reforms necessary for EU membership.

As unions try to resist privatization, we may witness a fracture develop between the PSD and labor unions. The broken Social Accord of 2001 is one sign, and there are others. When the workers at the Roman truck factory in Braşov went on strike in November of 2000, they treated Nastase's government as though it was the CDR of 1999. Demonstrators shouted slogans calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister and threatening a new revolution<sup>25</sup>. Ministers were able to diffuse the situation with promises and a conciliatory deal for the factory to produce a few fire trucks for Austria. The Economist reported, favorably, that Nastase had told the Roman SA workers to face the fact that their factory was unproductive and it would have to close if it could not become productive<sup>26</sup>. This sounds like something the CDR government might have said to unions, and represents a significant change in labor union-PSD relations.

Cartel ALFA leader Bogdan Hossu, in an interview with Ziarul Politic, stated his position that unions must hold public demonstrations and protests to achieve their goals, and added that it was his opinion that “a little violence” would sometimes be useful<sup>27</sup>. He is against negotiations with government, be the party PSD or another. This kind of rhetoric is meant to be inflammatory, but is nonetheless useful in its indication of the growing divide between unions and their “traditional” ally, the PSD.

The evolving nature of the relationship between labor unions and parties continues, and can be very well examined by a look at labor union activity during the budget debates in the fall of 2001. It should be understood that the PSD had negotiated a Social Accord for

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<sup>19</sup> Caterina NICOLAE, *Adevărul*, 24 Oct 2001, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> IONIȚA, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Caterina NICOLAE, *Adevărul*, 24 Oct 2001, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> C. POPA, *România Liberă*, 15 Sep 2001, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Caterina NICOLAE, *Adevărul*, 20 Sep 2001, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Caterina NICOLAE, *Adevărul*, 24 Oct 2001, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews with Roman SA workers during a street protest, 12 Nov 2001.

<sup>26</sup> “A Flicker of Hope”, *Economist*, 29 November 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Laurențiu SOLOMON, “It Seems That Only a Club Can Resolve Our Problems”, *Ziarul Politic*, 20 sep 2001.

2001 as part of the electoral campaign that restored it to power in 2000<sup>28</sup>. The agreement included specific promises, most notably higher salaries<sup>29</sup>. The government, in a move of transparency, sent the proposed budget to political parties and unions, thus making it public<sup>30</sup>. As unions had time to research proposals and plans, they reacted by calling for meetings to talk the issues over. This change in their method of political action comes of two accounts: firstly, the unions had in this instance been notified of the budget before official debate had begun, and had time to discuss issues with party leaders, and secondly, because the PSD leadership had shown that it was willing to discuss the issues, instead of flatly refusing any changes.

Meetings between unions and government representatives got under way in the first and second weeks of October. Government representatives from the Ministry of Public Finance met with union leaders to talk about how pensions and salaries are taxed<sup>31</sup>. Representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research met with C.N.S.L.R.-Fratia, Cartel Alfa, and C.S.D. (all labor union confederations) to discuss teachers' salaries and benefits<sup>32</sup>. The emerging pattern is that union leaders were able to discuss with their "employer" – the state – and at the same time with the ministries responsible for ensuring their rights. The results of the negotiations varied, with some ministries seemingly getting along better than others with union leaders.

Not all unions were satisfied with their negotiations, however. *România Liberă* reported that PSD representatives offered consolatory promises to teachers and university workers in order to keep them from demonstrating<sup>33</sup>. Romanian press covers union demonstrations well, and politicians fear scandals and opinion polls. In the case of the teachers unions, the promises were not considered enough, and so they went on strike anyway. Media covered the demonstrations with loyalty, in newspapers and all the major television stations. After a few days, most demonstrating unions obtained some of their demands from the government. Another example is Federația Sanitas, lobbying on behalf of nurses, which obtained the promises that it wanted from the government after protests led to further negotiations<sup>34</sup>.

The protests and demonstrations generated by the 2002 budget discussions are important not so much in their nature (unions have protested in the past, with negotiations that varied in degrees of success), but in their broad base. Instead of just the typical heavy industry unions, which face privatization difficulties, public sector unions also participated, as noted, with health and education playing a large role<sup>35</sup>. This indicates a growth in the ability of union leaders to organize nationwide demonstrations and to obtain the media's attention; no longer will the only unions the government needs to worry about demonstrating be from heavy industry. This changes the relationship with the labor unions and the government, because public sector unions are not likely to ever have their companies privatized.

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<sup>28</sup> Caterina NICOLAE and George SOLOMON, "The Government Plays Two Ways: Announcing Spending Cuts in Washington and Increased Salaries in Bucharest", *Adevărul*, 29 October 2001, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> It is a particular problem that in Romania, while prices are fixed to the Leu's inflation against the dollar, salaries (most of which are determined by the government in its budget) are fixed in lei until changed by law. This has the effect of allowing salaries to decrease in actual value as the Leu inflates and prices go up.

<sup>30</sup> An announcement to this effect was published in the newspaper *România Liberă*, 3 October 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Caterina NICOLAE, "Government Meets with Unions to Talk Tax Issues", *Adevărul*, 3 October 2001, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> V.M. and E.Ch., "Unions Discuss with MEC into the Night on Behalf of Teachers", *Adevărul*, 24 October 2001, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Camelia P. "University Professors Get Higher Wages from PSD", *România Liberă*, 26 October 2001.

<sup>34</sup> "Nurses Get What They Want in Meetings after Protest," *România Liberă*, 26 October 2001.

<sup>35</sup> IONIȚA, p. 26.

In the case of industry, privatization usually generates union backlash that can be very ugly for the government. The ongoing problems in Reșița are a good example. On the other hand, with a successful privatization the government can escape from union pressure as it is no longer the owner of the company (Sidex), and in this way enact reforms without causing too much social unrest. The issue of privatization continues to be hotly debated in the Romanian press and is a hot issue for labor unions, but it is in the interest of all concerned for the process to be successful. Unions have, to this end, been invited in some cases to view the privatization contracts before they are finalized. This follows a German model, where union leadership can even have a place on the company's board. It remains to be seen whether this model will be developed, which would give unions a bit more access, if not influence, or if Romanian Labor unions will lose access as well as influence in the years ahead. Also up for debate is the future of the "Social Accord" system. On Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, Cartel Alfa organized a protest that brought representatives from unions across the country to protest the Nastase government's failure to keep the 2001 Social Accord<sup>36</sup>. As of publication, they have yet to sign the new Accord for 2002. This could undo the system of agreement with the PSD, and we might see Cartel Alfa switch its allegiance to another political party.

### Professional Interest Groups

While labor unions get a lot of media attention for street demonstrations, professional interest groups have a much lower profile, although they do exist and also influence policy. As with labor unions, professional groups have organized in an attempt to attain the depth and breadth of membership to be influential. There are eight different business owners associations, and large industries usually have their own associations, such as the Romanian Banking Association (ABR), or the Association of Car Producers and Importers (APIA). While business groups are the least likely to ask members to participate in street demonstrations, they are perhaps the most likely to engage in "traditional" forms of lobbying.

Professional groups eschew street demonstrations because they are, generally, bad for business, and especially in an economy like Romania's it is hard for a business owner to evoke much public sympathy. This directs them to pursue a different avenue than that of labor unions in order to achieve influence. Groups try to develop expert status, publishing reports on their industry, how political policies affect business, and holding press conferences to publicize their issues. As with most developed countries, in Romania the groups' studies must compete with the government's own for accuracy and worth. The National Institute for Statistics puts out reports for the government, and many of the state owned industries have analysts who can readily provide data on their sectors. Any group that deals with an industry that was, or is, largely state owned thus finds itself competing with government reports.

In the case of industries that are mostly private, and especially those industries that do not have an involved history with communism, the ability to provide valuable information to the government is a powerful tool. For example, the APIA has lobbied for the introduction of tighter standards for cars, which will raise the price of used cars and allow the association members to gain more market share<sup>37</sup>. To lobby effectively, they need to convince politicians that enacting Euro zone 3 standards for cars in Romania will be a good policy. Studies and reports are presented to politicians in order to convince the idea has merit, that it will be good for the economy because it will encourage the production of new cars in Romania. This method is viable across industry barriers, and has also been used by the Textile Industry Owners Federation, which has lobbied the government to impose tariffs on textile raw

<sup>36</sup> "Syndicate Assault without Precedent Against Nastase Government", *Monitorul Online*, 26 November 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Despina PONOMARENCO, "More New Cars to Be Sold This Year", *Bucharest BusinessWeek*, 28 January 2002.

materials so that the industry might further develop itself in Romania<sup>38</sup>. Associations can thus lobby by "educating" politicians on what policies will allow the industry to grow and therefore help the economy to grow.

Another example is the already well-developed and influential ABR, which has lobbied the Prime Minister directly to strengthen the involvement of legal officers in banking scandals, to reduce bureaucracy and to soften the fiscal burden that banks face. A delegation of the ABR met with Nastase and asked for his support, then another group of 30 bankers met with the entire administrative council of the central bank to discuss issues<sup>39</sup>. This kind of group achieves influence by virtue of the economic importance of the sector that it deals with, and politicians cannot afford to ignore their input if they hope to expand the economy.

On the other hand, many of the industry groups are new and not very well developed, but still retain the potential to become very influential. The Romanian National Association of Internet Service Providers, 1.5 yrs old, represents 90% of the Internet Service Provider (ISP) market in Romania. This kind of association can ride the success of its industry to greater access and, ultimately, influence. Already it has influence in the business world; it successfully lobbied RomTelecom to cut the daytime surcharge rates on phone calls for Internet access by 75%<sup>40</sup>. The association has set up a common protocol for ISP's in Romania, which allows them to have a better business plan. Although perhaps not yet in a position to lobby for favorable legislation, this kind of association can readily act as a consultant for government policies dealing with Internet issues. This group, and others like it, will be able to gain access and perhaps influence due to depth of membership and the success of their industry.

Not all associations, or industries, have been very successful in Romania. Some groups are unable to influence policy because they represent a weak industry. The National Association of Insurance Companies, for example, has not been able to enforce industry standards and therefore has not achieved much depth of membership<sup>41</sup>. After ten years of trying to develop a free Romanian insurance market, a law is in discussion to establish a new national insurance fund run by the government. The association opposes the law, but may be ignored anyway by politicians anxious to please a public fed up with the private insurance system<sup>42</sup>. Those industries that create problems and find themselves labeled as a public enemy will have need of an association for protection and lobby, but may find they are too weak as an industry to stand in the face of public opinion.

In order to attract the members necessary to achieve depth, most industry groups adopt standards and then enforce them, in industries ranging from stockbrokers to pig farmers<sup>43</sup>. A number of groups in Romania do not accomplish this task, usually having difficulties with consumer protection issues. For example, a scandal erupted in Romanian media when the company owned by the president of the Romanian Meat Association sent produce contaminated with Salmonella bacteria to the market<sup>44</sup>. Of course, a scandal like this

<sup>38</sup> Daniel OANȚĂ, "The Textile Industry Wants to Export under Its Own Brand", *Adevărul*, 19 October 2001, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Luminița HOLBAN, "PM Listens to Bankers' Concerns", *Bucharest Business Week*, 28 January 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Bogdan MANOLEA, "Romanian ISP Association Celebrates Its First Year", *Europemedia.net*, 1 February 2002, accessed at <http://www.europemedia.net/shownews.asp?ArticleID=8128>.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Vasile DORU, Director of the Bucharest Branch of Metropol Insurance Company, 5 October 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Ioana POPA, "Insurers Fear State Monopoly", *Bucharest Business Week*, 14 January 2002.

<sup>43</sup> See "The Ethics Code of the Brokers to be Debated by the Union", *România Liberă*, 25 September 2001, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> For some perspectives on this story, see Gabriela DOBOȘ, "2.6 Tons of Produce from the Company of the President of the Romanian Meat Association Investigated in Iași", *Adevărul*, 7 November 2001, p. 8; and Isabella MANTA, "The Salmonella Pate Would Have Been Sold on the Black Market", *Adevărul*, 6 November 2001, p. 3.

greatly reduces the ability of an association to keep its members, who want a group that can be assured of having quality attached to its name. In this respect, a successful example is the Romanian Dentistry Association, which puts a label on dentistry products that it approves for use. The consumer can reliably trust the opinion of the expert group, and in turn the group should have more access to politicians because of its solid reputation.

Professional interest groups occupy a place in political decision-making, on a scale that varies widely based on industry importance and the level of public trust. Unfortunately, a study on these kinds of groups and their lobbying remains incomplete due to corruption, which is difficult to reliably study and has not been well documented yet by Romanian investigative authorities. The extent to which professional associations use corrupt means to achieve desired ends is not known. The media provides a source, but even in well publicized cases like that of businessman Sorin Vântu, a politically well-connected financier suspected of embezzlement, not enough details are known in order to reliably reconstruct a mechanism. It can be said that problems sometimes even exist on an industry level, as the press seems to believe in the case of timber, which indicates that much of the lobbying in Romania does suffer to a large degree from corruption<sup>45</sup>.

Despite corruption, professional interest groups do have legitimate and legal influence in Romanian politics, which they can achieve by being the experts in their industries and representing a depth of organizations within an industry. Interesting to note is that seven of the business owners' federations signed the new Social Accord along with government and labor union representatives on 6 March 2002<sup>46</sup>. This is an interesting shift to a German style of labor/management relations, where the government organizes and meditates the relationship between employers and workers. This could be a trend that will allow Romania to balance the two sometimes-conflicting interests in a way that will lessen street demonstrations and encourage effective policies.

## Promotional Interest groups

On the Communal-Association continuum, promotional interest groups are the most associational: they are usually formed around single issues (which can be broad or very narrow in nature) and their members are drawn from any of the communities within a society as they form relationships with one another based upon the position the group has on its issue. In this sense they differ from protectional groups, which are based on economic relationships. As with protectional groups, Truman's formation theory would suggest that the interest groups form according to threats and counter-threats. Perhaps the best example of this, in terms of scale, is the formation of groups attached to children and handicapped issues.

Following the fall of Ceaușescu, western media gained access into Romania. In early 1990 they found a story with international appeal in orphanages across the country, where conditions were difficult, and often appalling to western viewers. Detailed reports on television news shows like ABC's 20/20 in the United States generated large foreign interest in solving the problem, and that interest translated into foreign-funded foundations being founded to aid the children. The popularity of the plight of Romanian orphans hit a high point in 1991, the year in which American families adopted more children from Romania

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Camilia POPA, "Timber Export, under the Table", *România Liberă*, 2 November 2001, p. 1; or Camilia POPA, "Another Government Ordinance Falsified before Publication in the Official Monitor", *România Liberă*, 9 November 2001, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Two of the five union blocs did not sign the Accord, as well as one of the eight owner's organizations. See Caterina NICOLAE, "The Government, Unions, and Professional Groups Have all Gone over to the Same Side of the Table", *Adevărul*, 7 March 2002.

than from any other country<sup>47</sup>. That number had fallen to fifth by 2000, but the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (FDSC) had by then cataloged 996 groups, internationally and domestically based, whose self-described mission is to aid orphans and the handicapped<sup>48</sup>. The FDSC was able to identify 4015 organizations of civil society in its study, so the more meaningful way to present the number of orphan/handicap related groups would be to say that 24.8% of the groups registered by the study deal with orphans and handicapped children!

The formation of these groups has depended on two factors: 1) foreigners, and not Romanians, largely perceived the threat, and 2) it was in other countries that funding could be obtained<sup>49</sup>. As this pattern is repeated many times in the community of promotional interest groups in Romania, it is useful to divide the group into two separate camps: those groups who were mostly formed from international backing, and those groups which developed independently in Romania.

### Internationally Supported Groups

Most of the groups in Romania with a charitable goal have, or had, financing from international sources in order to carry out their operations. In addition to these groups, there are the 12 non-governmental organizations that form the Soros Open Network (SON), and other NGOs pursuing goals related to developing Romania as a country, that obtain funding from international sources. A third kind of internationally supported group are those that enter the Romanian scene in order to fight a battle related to an issue that they support. In this category the main visible players are animal rights groups that oppose policies on dealing with street dogs. Of course some of these groups are more willing than others to lobby with the government, and those that do vary their methods of political action based on their capabilities and likelihood for success.

Charity organizations are chiefly methods of disturbing humanitarian aid from foreign countries, but they are willing to get involved in politics when policy makers turn their attention to their particular issue. Perhaps the most visible example is the question of the Romanian orphanage system. News reporters again highlighted the issue 10 years after the revolution. Articles pointed out that 140,000 children were still in the state system, virtually the same number as in 1990, that orphanages were still understaffed, and that a true industry had grown up around the adoption process<sup>50</sup>. Armed with these reports EU officials convinced Romania to reform the process. Groups associated with the issue had long voiced concerns, but it took EU pressure to result in any change.

Interestingly enough, many of the groups felt that the Romania government took too much action, as a one-year ban on international adoptions was put in place. Up to 3,500 foreign couples had their adoptions "frozen," and groups who viewed adoption as the best possible outcome for the well being of the children sprang to action<sup>51</sup>. The prospective parents have put pressure on their home governments, which was strong enough for Prime

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<sup>47</sup> Robert VERESS, "Couples Find Joy in Romanian Orphanages", *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, 26 February 2002.

<sup>48</sup> *The Catalog of Civil Society*, 2000 ed., Foundation for the Development of Civil Society, Bucharest, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that Romanians were not concerned about the plight of their orphans, but rather that they did not perceive it to be a threat requiring immediate redress. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory supports this assertion, as according to the theory, a person's own needs, physical and emotional, must be met before that person will be able to devote significant attention to others' needs.

<sup>50</sup> Sue Lloyd ROBERTS, "Shopping for Romanian Babies", *BBC News*, 3 March 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Miahela PASA, "Romanian Adoption Clean-up Freezes Out Families", *Reuters*, 18 February 2002.

Minister Nastase to be urged to change the freeze policy on visits to France, Israel, and the United States<sup>52</sup>.

These examples illustrate a trend that disturbs many promotional interest groups – influence can only be obtained by using a foreign government. While this is true, it is not without reason. In order for a promotional group to move from a position of access to one of influence, it must give a reason to the politician. Labor unions depend on voting, professional organizations depend on economic expertise, and internationally supported promotional interest groups are still seeking mechanisms. Theoretically, they should be able to use expertise in whatever domain the group focused on, but in reality many of the pro-X and anti-Y groups in Romania do not have a track record of reliability and reputation of expertise.

Facing their history will help these social welfare groups to become more influential, but it will still not be easy. When foreign funding became available, many of the groups that were founded abused the funds, misdirecting them to personal endeavors, or were unable to use the funds to accomplish any meaningful good<sup>53</sup>. In the face of this “mass failure,” both foreign donors and local volunteers lost faith in the organizations, and the money and the willingness of citizens to cooperate disappeared<sup>54</sup>. Most of the guilty organizations are no longer active, and although still registered, do nothing. Most of the groups that are left are now handicapped by a lack of funding, and struggle to maintain a level of activity that will allow them to be respectable. Some of these groups are able to continue on through project based financing from the PHARE program, but this cannot be a permanent solution.

Other groups have had more steady sources of financing, being permanently supported by small but loyal organizations in other countries, like church groups and community clubs. These groups usually have very limited finances, based on the size of the supported group in a foreign country, and therefore tend to work on small projects of an open-ended nature, like the educations of orphans or supporting poor families so their children won't go to an orphanage.

Some of the charitable groups still trying to succeed have developed a new plan of action that focuses on working with local government instead of acting alone. This action promises good results. In the case of Together-Against-Drugs, a group from Bacău, cooperation with the city leaders has had good results. Instead of seeking to launch an independent anti-drug campaign, a plan was developed to have doctors make presentations to students in their classrooms. City leaders approved and it was carried out with government help. The group accomplished a step in achieving its goal, and the local politicians could claim the campaign as a step in the right direction, taken under their supervision.

On a national level, charity groups still have not succeeded in achieving much cooperation. Politicians are busy dealing with the pressing economic situations and have little interest in the social initiatives brought forth by the interest groups. Instead of cooperation, the politicians ask for money to further the government operations already in place<sup>55</sup>. Groups may find an easier path with the lower levels of government, even if it does limit the scope of their projects. With time and some good results, along with some consolidation efforts to provide greater breadth and depth, these groups may be able to accomplish more and become more influential in the political system.

The other interest groups established with the help of foreign money and expertise, which do not deal with sums of money and aid to distribute, are well developed. Some of them, notably the 12 groups that now make up the SON, are largely independent of outside sources for expertise. The SON associations, founded to deal with “education, child's rights,

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Karoly KIRALY, President of the Foundation for Szekler Towns, 13 November 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Gica ANTOLIU, President of the Bacau Local Initiative Foundation, 14 November 2001.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Calvin WOOD, a representative in Romania for Latter-Day Saint Charities, 5 November 2001.



cultural policies, rural assistance, economic development, health services and policies, minorities, community safety and mediation, legal reform, democracy and regional cooperation, European integration, equality of opportunities for men and women," are perhaps the most visible and well known of groups in this category<sup>56</sup>. They have established partnerships with institutes and NGOs in other countries, and frequently publish reports that are highly regarded. Due to their initial good funding, they attracted academic talent that, combined with smart leadership, gave them a good start. These foundations are at the top of the "expert" game. This allows them to have access and perhaps even influence with the politicians, not just in Romania, but also in EU countries. It is difficult to say exactly how much they have influenced policy in Romania, because much of their influence is more indirect, in terms of educating and changing broad agenda. On the smaller scale, however, they have been influential in developing projects and systems in connections with government ministries<sup>57</sup>.

One foreign group that has made headlines in Romanian and foreign press is the Austrian based animal rights group Vier Pfoten. When the mayor of Bucharest, Traian Băsescu, decided to use a plan involving euthanasia to tackle the rampant street dog problem, Vier Pfoten became a group of the momentum. With a blitz of activities, including distributing flyers on the streets, launching television style ads at movie theaters, and conducting clandestine investigations into the details of the city's euthanasia operation, the group was able to convince Mr. Băsescu that the dogs should be neutered instead of killed.

### Locally Initiated Groups

Many of the locally initiated associations that exist also have received funding from foreign sources, but these groups differ from the internationals in that Romanians lead them. These groups tell more about the nature of promotional interest groups in Romania because they are native to the civil society dynamic. The most influential of these groups are those associated with civil rights and the revolution. There are also groups dealing with promoting economic development and easing the pain of Romania's transitioning economy, and groups that have followed the path laid out by the SON foundations and others like them. Smaller yet are the number of locally led groups concerned with issues that are more typical in other countries: gay rights, anti-drugs, anti-smoking, or environmental protection.

The revolution spawned a desire for many Romanians to exercise their newfound rights. Under the leadership of communist dissidents and others, many groups formed that were centered on guaranteeing the new freedoms of the people. Many of these groups were very active in the period immediately following the revolution, and some were also very politicized. Two of them, the Civic Alliance and the Association 21 December 1989 were founding members of the center-right Romanian Democratic Convention, an alliance of political parties and NGOs that won elections in 1996. These groups, although very different in membership, have both enjoyed large popular support and are well known.

Activists who took part in the first day of the revolution in Bucharest formed 21 December 1989 in the days immediately following the revolution, with the goal of continuing Romania's transition to a stable democracy. It is a patriotic organization that has a limited number of full members – a candidate must prove that he took part in revolutionary activities on the 21<sup>st</sup> to become a member<sup>58</sup>. This group organized and started the protests in University Square that ended with the miners' riots, and boasted enough political prestige to be a

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<sup>56</sup> The SON website, available at <http://www.son.ro>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Călin CĂLANCEA, President of Association "21 December 1989", 16 January 2002.

founder of the CDR<sup>59</sup>. More recently representatives of the association were invited to testify before the parliament concerning new NGO legislation, but parliament summarily dismissed their suggestions and Căţalin Căţancea, the President of the group, suspects that they were only invited due to EU pressure for Romania's government to cooperate more with NGOs<sup>60</sup>. Currently faced with financial problems caused by the breakdown of the CDR and internal issues, the association has not been as active as it was in the past.

This group's history shows some of the difficulties faced and successes enjoyed by promotional interest groups in Romania. Due to support from a sector of the Romanian public concerned with obtaining a completely communist free government, the group was influential in dealing with political parties in the period following the revolution until some time during the CDR administration. The success of the association was linked to the political success of the parties it affiliated with. The decrease in popularity of the CDR government affected the association, creating internal strife and conflict over the direction that the group needed to take. Many members left the group and joined others, or simply became inactive. The drop in public trust, as well as the general state of the Romania economy, has caused financial problems because the association depends on public donations and member dues. Without outside funding, the association has been unable to organize activities that keep it in the public's eye, and the resulting loss of popularity has also hurt its ability to gain access to political parties and even other NGOs. For this group, the future is uncertain.

Another group with a more certain future is the Civic Alliance, founded on 7 November 1990 by communist dissidents and intellectuals as a reaction to the miners' riots of the early summer. Also a very politicized group, it helped get the CDR elected in 1996 and then suffered some of the same problems as 21 December 1989 did as a result of the ensuing political failure of the CDR. But from the beginning it differed immensely from 21 December. Open membership allowed for growth, and branches were founded in cities across the country shortly after the original founding in Bucharest. Open membership also widened the leadership talent pool and gave the group diversity and therefore flexibility. The Alliance decided to split itself into a foundation-arm, to promote its charitable and educational aspects, and the activist-arm, to promote desired political policies. Then, following the dismal 2000 elections, a new president was chosen and a new platform upheld: no longer would the Alliance engage in formal cooperation with political parties. Current President Şerban Rădulescu-Zoner affirms that move is intended to allow the group to regain the trust of the people and to allow it to cultivate working relationships with all political parties<sup>61</sup>. This new agenda will take time, but the end result is designed to be access to government officials.

Achieving access and influence is an issue that all of the promotional interest groups in Romania must face, but is part of the political process. Sometimes the public would like a group to influence the government, and sometimes they would like a group to not even have access. Unlike protectional interest groups, promotional groups usually represent small minorities, and if they do exercise a lot of influence in government, politicians can be punished at the voting polls. But sometimes it does prove true that a committed, organized and very vocal minority can thwart the desires of a silent majority. A scene currently unfolding around the Dracula Park initiative is a good example. When Tourism Minister Agathon announced a plan to build the park near Sighişoara, a town on UNESCO's World

<sup>59</sup> The exact origin of the protest is debatable, but whether spontaneous or planned, many of those who began the protests by going on hunger strikes were members of the association, which conducted most of the mass activities. Other NGOs, most notably the Students' League at the University of Bucharest, also took part.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Căţalin CĂLANCEA.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Şerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, President of the Civic Alliance, 10 January 2002.

Heritage list, and its old growth oak forest, some residents were excited at the prospect of jobs while others were angered over possible environmental and historical damages. A group of about 200 local citizens, composed of artists, religious leaders, and environmentalists, organized to oppose the park<sup>62</sup>. They have held meetings, contacted press representatives, tried to involve local and international organizations, and through these efforts have created a noisy protest in newspapers and on television stations. Still, it remains to be seen what will happen, as many suspect that a silent majority in Sighișoara and the surrounding area would still welcome the hoped for economic boom<sup>63</sup>. A classic case is presented to the politicians; they must decide who to anger and who to please: the protesters, very committed to their cause and now boasting international friends, or those who hope the park might bring economic growth. Regardless of the result, it can already be seen that the interest group involvement has brought attention to issues dealing with the park's construction and this has led to further debate on the issue. In this sense, the group has participated in Romanian democracy, and this is why promotional interest groups are useful to citizens: they allow people to more effectively present their desires to politicians in between elections.

## Up and Coming Issues

Romanian interest groups can be divided into two separate stages of development. The first stage, from 1989 to the elections of 1996, is marked by a large number of groups being formed, both domestically and internationally financed, in an atmosphere of uncertain democracy. Typically, labor unions and the locally formed promotional groups were very politicized, while a minority of promotional groups focused on gaining expertise. The line that distinguishes an interest group from a political party – parties seek to obtain office, interest groups simply seek to influence the policy maker – was very blurred in this period. Thousands of welfare-oriented associations were created only to fail in their stated purposes a short time later due to corruption and dishonest use of funds. Labor unions organized into large confederations and were able to slow and sometimes reverse economic reforms by exercising influence in government. Many of the promotional groups created in this period were formed as opposition to the ruling socialists, and were very politicized. The public saw lobby actions as nothing more than corruption. Professional organizations formed slowly as industries privatized and as new companies were founded and associations were organized to promote the group's interests.

This first stage affirms disturbance theory, showing that it is valid in Romania's post-communist environment, where poverty and lack of experience exists. Had internationally led groups been the only to have formed and to have had any degree of access or influence, it would be certain that disturbance theory would need to be adjusted for mitigating socio-economic factors. The findings of the study indicate, rather, that socio-economic factors, while important in interest group survival and levels of influence, are not important in terms of affecting group formation.

The second stage, from the 1996 elections to the present, is one of consolidation and a maturing process. This is not to say that groups are no longer forming, which is certainly not true. But the numbers of groups forming now is much smaller – the rate of group formation has slowed. All of the groups are now vying for access and influence, organizing and

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<sup>62</sup> Eugen TOMIC, "Romania's Dracula Park Expected to Pump Fresh Blood into Ailing Tourism Industry", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 9 November 2001.

<sup>63</sup> *România Liberă* has published an entire series of articles on this issue, many written by the activists. The President, Alexandru GOȚA, wrote "The Imense Influx of Tourists Will Destroy Any Chance of Regeneration by Some of the Young Trees on Briete Platou", *România Liberă*, 12 March 2002, p.4.

reordering themselves in function of resources, talents, areas of interest, levels of expertise and willingness to cooperate with each other. Groups that were able to succeed on mass appeal are dwindling. When government changed hands in 1996, the general population perceived that the interest groups formed around pro-democracy anti-communist issues had achieved their goals. As a result of achieving the goal of electoral victory and also as a result of the unpopularity of the CDR governments, many of these groups began to suffer serious problems following the elections. They lost trust with the people and many of them now face issues of organizational survival. While many of the promotional groups struggled, labor unions were also affected by the change. CDR governments did not give in to them as easily as the previous governments had, and this set a new precedent in relations between politicians and labor unions. Following electoral victory for the PSD in 2000, we see that the party once easily influenced by labor unions is now more inclined to please international analysts from the EU and NATO.

In an effort to regain large-scale support, many of the promotional groups are changing strategies – moving from cooperation with political parties to an independent platform (depoliticization) and cooperation with other interest groups to form organizations of breadth and depth. The coalition forming activities now taking place among many promotional groups has largely completed itself among the labor unions and professional associations.

Presently, interest groups in Romania still face difficult issues as they form, solidify, and seek access and influence. These issues are specific to the type of interest group in question, having been overcome by some groups. The most difficult issue for promotional groups is a lack of funding, a problem related both to the poor state of the economy and to corruption. Important to both promotional and protectional groups is the issue of achieving trust – becoming a group of access.

Among all of the promotional groups interviewed during the study, the biggest problem to them accomplishing any goal is a lack of funding. To be sure, although not all groups suffer funding difficulties to the same degree, they feel that they need more money in order to be effective. This is not amazing. Even in a country like the United States, interest groups constantly raise money in order to expand their activities. At issue for the group in Romania, however, is how to exist without international funding. Romanian groups desire international funding because it solves their domestic financial problems.

The SON groups, founded by philanthropist George Soros, are in a privileged class in Romania. They were well endowed in their beginning stages, and therefore attracted talent and were able to create a good image for themselves. Now, due to their reputations, they can successfully ask for international donations through their Internet web site, and attract more international funding from projects such as PHARE.

Designed by the EU to foster the growth of civil society, PHARE is a project based grant system – grants are awarded for projects proposed by different groups. There are many more proposals than there is money for, and, as a result, some groups do not get PHARE funding even though they have submitted a worthy project. Issues of uncertainty, raised by some promotional groups, are that the awards are given to political friends<sup>64</sup>, or that groups outside of Bucharest are at a disadvantage because they aren't informed about deadlines for project submittal<sup>65</sup>. In light of these kinds of complaints, it must be admitted that the PHARE system does favor the well-connected and well-respected groups, but this is an expected consequence of interest groups, and to the victors go the spoils.

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, President of the Civic Alliance, 10 January 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Gicu ANTOHI, President of the Foundation for Local Initiative – Bacău “FILBAC”, 14 November 2001.

Other sources of international money exist besides PHARE, but these sources are limited to those groups that have a level of expertise. An example is the Romanian Academic Society (SAR), which now does reports for the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) in Romania, and was started locally by concerned Romanian academics<sup>66</sup>. The group is small and has no plans to become a large membership organization, but is content to be what it is: a few educated Romanians who work to improve their country by conducting research and publishing reports. SAR did such great work that they were hired by the UNDP to publish a series of "Early Warning Reports" on the social, economic, and political issues in the country. But not every group can hope to be hired by an international party.

Among those groups that cannot access funds from international sources, financial problems are paramount. Most locally initiated groups, protectional and promotional, did not intend to rely on international money when they were founded, and were designed to rely on dues collected from members. These systems are largely ineffective as a result of the poor economy. Consider a group like Association 21 December 1989 – 226 actual members augmented by 20,000 associate members, of which roughly 10,000 are retired and 5,000 are jobless<sup>67</sup>. This indicates a troubling point: many people join interest groups not in order to help the group, but because they hope the group will be able to help them. With this kind of membership, the association is behind four months on its rent and RomTelecom has threatened to cut off the phone line<sup>68</sup>. Even professional groups can have troubles with their budgets, one of the national doctors' associations interviewed stated that it can no longer organize conferences because it has no money to secure a location, and even if it could its members would be hard pressed to attend due to travel and hotel costs<sup>69</sup>. The future of many of the locally founded groups that have not been able to access international sources of money is currently being decided. Some will endure until the economy improves, and may then become more active. Some will disappear into inactivity, perhaps to resurface under a better economic climate, but perhaps to be forgotten.

Those groups that have already solved their financial problems are moving on in their development; some of the local groups have found strength in networking, which may prove to give them an edge. One example is a recently formed coalition, the Civic Initiative for Responsible Political Behavior (ICRAP)<sup>70</sup>. It is composed of 12 organizations of very differing natures: promotional groups like the ProDemocracy Association and the Pro Europe League, protectional labor union confederations like Cartel Alfa, and also protectional professional groups like the National Council of Business Owners of Romania<sup>71</sup>. These groups have organized to create a framework for dialogue so that they might learn from one another and cooperate to achieve common goals, like improving the political system and the economy. In short, they are working together to make Romania a better place to live.

These sorts of large confederations formed within a few years after the revolution among the promotional groups, but are only now starting to form among protectional groups.

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, a director for the Romanian Academic Society, 5 February 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Călin CĂLANCEA, President of Association "21 December 1989", 16 January 2002.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Dr. Adrian OLARU, President of the National Association of Private Doctors and Pharmacists of Romania, 14 November 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Ileana LUCACIU, "Initiativa Civica pentru Responsabilitatea Actului Politic: The Need for an Electoral Code to consolidate morality and reform of politics", *România Liberă*, 6 October 2001, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> All of the members of ICRAP are: the ProDemocracy Association (founder), the Nongovernmental Professional Association of Social Assistance. (ASSOC), Cartel Alfa, the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (FDSC), the Students' Association of the University of Bucharest (ASUB), the Political Science Students' Association (ASSP), the Resource Center for NGO's (CRONOS), the National Confederation of Business Owners of Romania (CNPR), the National Council of Business Owners of Romania (CONPR), the Institute for Public Politics (IPP), the Pro Europe League, and the Civic Alliance.

Even more interesting, confederations are starting to form among interest groups of both a protectional and promotional nature. It may be that via the Internet and dialogues initiated by groups like the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society, more and more groups will form networks by which they will be able to collectively focus on their stated missions, and achieve access and influence in an issue network.